

February 24, 2004

Zellers to close its downtown store in May

Sudbury Star

'One day the stockroom was full, the next day it was empty,' store employee says

The downtown core will be without a department store starting May 15.

That's the day the Rainbow Value Centre's largest tenant -- the 73,000-square-foot Zellers store -- closes its doors.

Katherine Raso, corporate communications spokeswoman with the Hudson Bay Co. in Toronto, which owns Zellers, said Thursday the store was "non-strategic" in the company's plans.

"Part of our strategy is to always review our store portfolios," she said. "We have more than 500 stores ... Our strategy is to shut down non-strategic stores.

"We have three locations in Sudbury. Closing one of them will help the other two."

When asked if "non-strategic" meant non-profitable, Raso declined to say it did.

"It means a number of different factors," she said. "It doesn't just say non-profitable. It doesn't mean it wasn't as profitable as the other two."

The store's 87 full- and part-time employees were told about the closure yesterday.

Raso said a hiring freeze has been implemented at the other two Zellers stores located in the Southridge Mall and Supermall. Unlike staff in the Rainbow Value Centre store, staff in those two stores is not unionized.

The news angered Sudbury senior Alex Horth, 80, who walks to the Rainbow Value Centre from his Notre Dame Avenue housing complex regularly for a coffee and to shop.

"I don't want it," he said, sitting next to a huge box of Tide laundry detergent with a Zellers sticker on it. "I want them to keep it open. I buy lots of stuff there. I bought two bikes for my granddaughter's birthday there."

Suzanne Carriere, manager of Talk of the Town Fashions, which is in the mall's centre courtyard opposite Zellers, could not believe the store was closing.

"We need it," she said. "It's a mall. Without a big company like Zellers, the mall is going to close ... I don't know what we are going to do."

Archie Duckworth, regional staff representative with the United Food and Commercial Workers' Union, said a union meeting will be held Sunday at the Ramada Inn to discuss the closure and employee options. More than 70 of the store's employees are members of Local 175.

Duckworth said workers will be offered severance packages and, because of the hiring freeze at the other two Zellers stores, can bid on any jobs that come up there.

The action centre will do everything from compiling a list of job possibilities in the city to exploring education and retraining options, said Duckworth.

Duckworth said some employees have been working at the store for 30 years, going back to the days when the store was a two-level Bonimart department store.

At one time, there were three department stores downtown. The other two were Canadian Tire and Eatons (also located in the City Centre).

A Zellers employee who declined to give her name said employees had a feeling something was coming down.

"One day the stockroom was full, the next day it was empty," she said. "We knew something was up -- we just knew it.

"I don't get it ... They are closing this location and we are doing better than the other two stores."

The employee said senior customers are upset about the news.

"The seniors are really taking it hard," she said. "They really depend on us. They buy something at the grocery store. They find it's too expensive. They come to Zellers."

Ray Hirani, general manager of the Rainbow Value Centre, was out of town and could not be reached for comment.

A call to the Reno, Nevada, headquarters of Vista Hospitality, which owns the mall, was not returned.

Zellers acquired the store from the **Towers** chain in 1990. In 1996, the store had 111 full- and part-time employees and was the only Zellers in the city.

Return to [Towers Department Stores](#)